

Discipleship in the days of Jesus (II)

by Pr Abri Brancken, 5 Feb 2017

How does one become a disciple?

To understand discipleship, you must understand the ancient Jewish way of educating children. For the Jews, education was one of their highest values. It was the way that they passed on their faith to the next generation.

We need to take a look at the customs, traditions and religious setting of the first century.

One of the greatest honours that could be bestowed on any young Galilean man was to be accepted and counted worthy of being a disciple of a Rabbi. Jesus was not the only one with disciples. John the Baptist had disciples (Matthew 9:14), as did the Pharisees (Matthew 22:16). Let's take a look at these different groups of religious leaders in the Galilee area during the time of Jesus.

Types of Galilee Teachers

Who were the Pharisees?

The Sadducees and Pharisees formed part of the ruling class of Israel. The term Pharisee is derived from an Aramaic word meaning, "separated".

The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen, and therefore were in contact with the common man. The Pharisees were held in high esteem by the common man. They were a fairly small group, but they had great control in the decision making process of the Sanhedrin.

They accepted the written Word as inspired by God, the Tanach (Old Testament). But, they also gave equal authority to oral tradition. The Pharisees sought to strictly obey oral traditions along with the Old Testament (Matthew 9:14; 15:1-9; 23:5; 23:16, 23, Mark 7:1-23; Luke 11:42).

They believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6).

They believed in an afterlife, with appropriate reward and punishment on an individual basis.

They believed in the existence of angels and demons (Acts 23:8).

Who were the Sadducees?

The Sadducees were aristocrats, nobles. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priests and high priest, and they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin.

They worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of Rome. Because they were accommodating to Rome and were the wealthy upper class, they did not relate well to the common man, nor did the common man hold them in high opinion.

The Sadducees preserved the authority of the written Word of God.

They were extremely self-sufficient to the point of denying God's involvement in everyday life.

They denied any resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 23:8).

They denied any afterlife, holding that the soul perished at death, and therefore denying any penalty or reward after the earthly life.

They denied the existence of a spiritual world, i.e., angels and demons (Acts 23:8).

Because the Sadducees were more concerned with politics than religion, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention. It was at this point that the Sadducees and Pharisees united and conspired to put Christ to death (John 11:48-50; Mark 14:53; 15:1).

Who were the Teachers of the Law?

- They were the Scribes

- Constant repetition & study of the Word.

Scribes were also called rabbis by some

The Scribes were also called rabbis and they demanded from their students absolute reverence, even more so than the pupils honor for his own father. It was taught that:

"respect to a teacher should exceed respect for a father, for both father and son owe respect to a teacher" (Kerithoth 6.9).

They appeared to be so learned. They taught in schools. Their students could only teach what has been delivered to them. Students could not make interpretations of the text.

Who were the Rabbis?

The Rabbis were experts in the Tanach (Old Testament), often knowing it by memory.

Had authority to interpret God's Word, not just teach it.

A rabbi taught his disciples by doing, than by merely saying it. For example, in speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus made a much stronger statement to the disciples about racial and sexual discrimination than he would have done by mere verbal instruction.

The Rabbi was a **master teacher**.

Great **storytellers**. Getting people to learn the scriptures.

Believe to have "Smicha", meaning that they had authority from God. "Smicha" is derived from a Hebrew word which means to "rely on" or "to be authorized".

Did life with their disciples

Many first century Rabbis were also healers.

A disciple's actions were expected to be consonant with his master's doctrine. The disciple often would represent his rabbi in legal discussions and other matters.

In general, the actions of a disciple reflected on the “family name” of his teacher. The disciples and their master were considered a “household” (see Matthew 10:25).

JC had authority

Mat 7:28 ***It happened, when Yeshua had finished saying these things, that the multitudes were astonished at his teaching,***

Mat 7:29 ***for he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes.***

Being a Talmid of Yeshua (Jesus Christ)

A disciples is more than just a student of a teacher.

A disciple is not only pursuing knowledge.

A first century disciple does not only want to know what the teacher knows., but be what the teacher is.

The word disciple is “Talmid” in Hebrew.

The term disciple in English comes to use from a **Latin** root meaning **learner or pupil**, where a student wants to know what the teacher knows. He wants data, information in order to gain knowledge.

A talmid’s goal is not just to gain knowledge or data, but a disciple wants to like the teacher. He wants to become what the Master is. The rabbi-talmid relationship was a very intense and personal system of education. A Talmid is someone with a intense commitment to be exactly what the Rabbi is. Not in personality, mannerisms, etc., but in existence, in their being.

Unlike discipleship today, there was no curriculum or agenda for this multi-year discipling experience. It was a continual daily relational living experience where either the rabbi would ask questions of the disciple as he closely observed the disciple’s daily life, or the disciple would initiate a discussion by raising an issue or asking a question based on some aspect of his daily life.

A Talmid has a passion to be just like, totally consumed with the desire to be just like the Rabbi. Talmid talked, slept, ate, dreamed, to be like their Rabbi. The goal was to eventually become a teacher or Rabbi himself, passing on a lifestyle to his *talmidim*. Not just information!

How badly do you want to be like Jesus Christ. Does the desire to be like JC consume your everyday life? Discipleship a life consumed with the desire to be like the Rabbi Yeshua. It is not a course, but a 24 hour a day lifestyle.

The disciple’s understanding of “believe” was not based on an intellectual assent to a creed, doctrinal statement, or series of faith propositions. Rather, to a first-century disciple believe is a verb in which you willingly submitted to your rabbi’s interpretive authority regarding God’s Word in every area of your life. Thus, to say you were a disciple in the name of Jesus, meant that you totally surrendered your life to Jesus’ way of interpreting Scripture. As a result, you conformed all of your life’s behavior to his interpretations.